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SafetyWorks! Newsletter for a Safer Workplace, Spring 2004

Maine Department of Labor

Maine Bureau of Labor Standards

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Spring 2004



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SafetyWorks!

Quarterly news for a safer workplace

Maine Department of Labor Addresses Odors That Affect Worker Health

Michaela Loisel, Maine Department of Labor Equal Opportunity Officer

ARE FRAGRANCES A PROBLEM IN YOUR WORKPLACE? Human resource professionals and managers are increasingly being asked to do something about the effects of chemicals, odors, and fragrances in the workplace. The Maine Department of Labor recently implemented a "Policy on Chemicals and Fragrances in the Workplace." Rather than banning perfumes, colognes and other heavily scented products, the policy requests that employees not use them. We want to educate our workforce and clients about the real effect chemicals and fragrances can have on individuals with sensitivities. Many people are unaware that the scents they use can actually make another person ill — sometimes seriously.

In the last five years, we have seen a marked increase in the number of people who are sensitive to chemicals and fragrances. Sensitivities can result in symptoms such as headaches, trouble with concentration, rashes, open sores, and breathing problems, to name a few. While some affected people report being uncomfortable, others are sent to medical care providers with serious health problems.

Enforcement of the policy starts with education. We are meeting with small work groups to show a film on multiple chemical sensitivity* and hold discussions on enforcing the policy. We suggest that

to comply with the policy, a personal fragrance should not reach beyond two feet of the wearer.

The Department also plans to make the policy known to customers through mailings and notices posted outside of all Department buildings. In addition, announcements for conferences, training, and large meetings will carry the following statement: *"In order to accommodate people with sensitivities to fragrances, please refrain from using fragrant products at this event."*

For more information about the Department of Labor's fragrance policy, contact Michaela Loisel at michaela.loisel@maine.gov. For information on multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) and work, go to the OSHA web page: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/multiplechemicalsensitivities/>. For more MCS resources go to <http://www.abilitymaine.org/guides/mcs.html>.



*Video #360, available from the SafetyWorks! video lending library.

Smoking at Work

Maine has a strong worksite smoking law. All employers must have and post a written policy to protect workers from secondhand smoke. Employers may ban smoking completely. Or, they can have an enclosed and separately-ventilated smoking area, as long as smoke doesn't get into work areas. The Partnership for a Tobacco-Free Maine is responsible for smoking prevention and control, but enforcement of the tobacco laws is carried out by the Office of The Attorney General. For more information, call the Department of Human Services, Partnership for a Tobacco-Free Maine at 287-4625 or go to <http://www.tobaccofreemaine.org/>. OSHA regulations do not address smoking at work.



Does it Really Work?

A new NIOSH guide, "*How to Evaluate Safety and Health Changes in the Workplace*," shows managers how to look at changes they have made to improve safety and health in the workplace in order to find out if they really work. View the booklet online at: www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2004-135/downloads/Manual_2-25-04.pdf or contact NIOSH for a free copy: 1-800-35-NIOSH; e-mail: pubstaf@cdc.gov

**Approximately 300,000 people
are injured each year
(some permanently)
from falls from ladders.**

**Check out the new SafetyWorks!
online ladder safety course
at www.safetyworksmaine.org**

*Learn right from your desk
and earn a certificate.*

Lakewood Shares Success

Lakewood Continuing Care Center is a 76-bed long-term healthcare facility in Waterville. Like most long-term care facilities, back injuries are a major concern. Switching to a No-Lift Program for direct care staff three years ago has brought good results. They have had fewer reportable injuries, light duty days, and lost workdays.

But support staff also are at high risk for back injury. As safety committee chair Donna McEachern puts it, "Support staff face lifting of different types that should be stressed as well." She points to the housekeeping staff, who bend over to change trash can liners hundreds of times a week. Maintenance, food service, activities, and rehab staff also do repeated bending, pushing, pulling and lifting. Donna adds, "In-services should be modified to include specific focus on all departments'... lifting practices." Lakewood holds annual Skills Fairs, where all staff receive back care education related to their day to day activities.

In addition, Donna brings issues discussed at monthly safety meetings to the attention of nursing staff, who make needed changes right away. Donna has invited SafetyWorks! in for an onsite audit and uses SafetyWorks! Newsletter articles to educate staff.

This multifaceted approach to back injury prevention—equipment, training, consultation, and employee involvement—helps keep Lakewood employees safe.



Lakewood Safety Committee members, from left: Donna McEachern, Penny Lagasse, Patty Bird, Jill Deraps

Visit our web site at www.safetyworksmaine.org

Safety Council's Merge

The Maine Safety Council has combined with New Hampshire Safety Council to form The Safety and Health Council of Northern New England. (Check out their Web site at www.shcnne.org.)

School's Out Soon - Keep Teen Workers Safe

Summer is a time for teens to be safe and healthy at work. If you hire teens, make sure you know the child labor laws and how to protect your young workers.

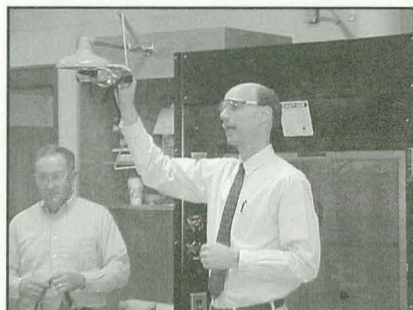
www.safeteen.org

www.maine.gov/labor/bls/wagehour.htm

www.osha.gov/teens



Keeping Schools Safe



SafetyWorks! industrial hygienist Dale Siulinski demonstrates safety equipment at Ellsworth High School while J. F. Byrnes, Ellsworth science department chair, looks on. 150 science teachers from around the state took part in five SafetyWorks! lab safety classes this spring.

Information in the articles is not a substitute for official policy or regulations. The editor is Lynne Lamstein, director of outreach and education for the Bureau of Labor Standards.

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The Maine Department of Labor provides equal opportunity employment and programs. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.



New FACE Report on Workplace Homicide

The Bureau of Labor Standards recently released its fourth Fatality Assessment, Control and Evaluation (FACE) report. The report describes a workplace homicide that resulted from a robbery at a retail store in Maine and offers guidelines for preventing assaults at work. FACE reports are excellent training tools and provide valuable information for injury prevention programs. For a free copy of this or other FACE reports, call 624-6400 or go to www.maine.gov/labor/bls/FACE.htm



SafetyWorks! and the Maine Safety Council sponsored "Effective Strategies to Prevent Workplace Violence" on May 3 in Portland. Presenters from Workplace Solutions, a New York based workplace violence prevention organization, and Maine Employers Against Domestic Violence used case studies and interactive theatre to teach participants how to recognize and effectively respond to conflict and violence in the workplace.

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*Quarterly news for
a safer workplace*

Spring 2004

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Injuries are easy to see. They usually happen in an instant, caused by a recognizable event, resulting in obvious damage to the body. Illnesses are not so easy to classify, their causes often unclear or remote, the damage taking years to become apparent.

Exposure to chemical substances is a common precursor to occupational illness. Sometimes the association between the exposure and the disease is clear, as in the case of asbestos and asbestosis. Often it is less clear. In this issue we look at chemical sensitivity and smoking in the workplace. We know that chemicals in the form of cleaning products and fragrances make certain workers uncomfortable or sick. We know that many people find secondhand smoke both unpleasant and a

health risk. While OSHA regulations do not address such exposures, mounting evidence points to negative health effects from long term low level exposure to chemicals and tobacco smoke.

When you assess the hazards at your workplace, remember that OSHA regulations provide minimum protection and don't address all the possible exposures in a modern workplace. Be on the alert for all the substances and events that might jeopardize the health or safety of workers.

William A. Peabody, Director
Bureau of Labor Standards